

**DRUMMING GAMES AND DRUM CIRCLES**  
**OREGON MUSIC EDUCATOR'S CONFERENCE**  
**JANUARY, 2018**

Why do we do drum circles and play drum games?

Why a circle?

What's the difference?

Games – play together, rules of the game – but no winners/losers

Circles – develop group synergy, open-ended

**STORY:**

**Eagle Drums**

Intention – sound exploration, synergy, non-verbal and verbal communication

An eagle was flying over mountains and rivers and lakes and streams, when it saw a mouse scrabbling around in the field.

**Scrabbling sounds**

The eagle sah-**wooped** down and grabbed the mouse in its beak.

The mouse **wriggled and wriggled and wriggled**.

The mouse said, "Let me go." "**Let me go.**"

So the eagle dropped the mouse – **boom** – and flew away looking for food.

The eagle flew over mountains and rivers and lakes and streams.

Soon the eagle saw a snake slithering through the grass:

**Slithering sounds on drum head.**

Repeat last four lines.

The eagle flew over mountains and rivers and lakes and streams.

Next the eagle saw a squirrel climbing up and down the trees.

**Tap up and down drum shell.**

Repeat last four lines.

The eagle decided it needed to look further away so it flew over continents and oceans and deserts and jungles. It looked down into the savannah and saw an elephant.

**Stomping steady beats all together**

The eagle sah-**wooped** down but the elephant grabbed the eagle in its trunk!

The eagle **wriggled and wriggled and wriggled**.

The eagle said, "Let me go." "**Let me go.**"

The elephant let the eagle go and said, "I'm a vegetarian."

Play **I'm a vegetarian** rhythmically on the drum together.

The eagle was very tired and hungry. It flew back over deserts and jungles and oceans and continents until it landed safely in it's nest.

**Land softly on the drums.**

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**SONG:**

Bim Bum Biddy

Intention – cooperation, flexibility with others' mistakes

Teach song first with body percussion: bim = lap, bum = clap, biddy = snap

Move to laps: bim = lap to your right, bum = your lap, biddy = lap to your left

Move to drums: bim = drum to your right, bum = your drum, biddy = drum to your left

Add challenge: biddy = 2 hits

**GAMES:**

1. Let's All Play the Drum

Intention – focus, synergy

Say the phrase "let's all play the drum" in a variety of rhythms, tempi, phrase lengths. Everyone plays on the word "drum."

Extension 1: Leader plays "let's all play the" on a woodblock very rhythmically, but with varying tempos, and all play on **drum**.

Extension 2: "Let's all play the **drum** because it's **so much fun**." Everyone plays on bold words. **Drum** may still be out of time, but **so much fun** will be rhythmic.

2. Finger Rumble

Intention – communication, collaboration, focus

Use fingers to rumble on edge of drum. Leader plays one loud sound in the middle of drum and all others try to play with leader. Leader then can look at someone in the circle and that person plays a quick "ruffle" – a few loud notes. Leader looks at a group of people and they play a quick "ruffle". All communication is with eye contact.

Leader can "roll" the responsibility to any other member of the group any time.

3. Orbit

Intention - synergy, pulse, rhythmic communication

Leader passes a sound around the circle.

Sound choices: one sound as fast around as possible; one sound but with a pulse; one rhythm passed steadily around the circle.

4. Pieces of Eight

Intention – pulse, synergy

Tell everyone to choose a secret number between one and eight. They will play their drum one time on that number. Count an eight-beat pulse and let everyone play only on their number.

Extension 1: Play two numbers (the same each time)

Extension 2: Play two or three sounds on the same number.

Extension 3: Use Boomwhackers.

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5. Polyrhythm Words

Intention – polyrhythms, listening, focus, vocabulary builder

Choose two words, one with three syllables (cantaloupe) and one with two syllables (lemon). Divide group in half and have play cantaloupe (three sounds with the first accented) and half play lemon (two sounds with the first accented.) Let it settle, then have the groups continue to play their strong beat but stop playing the weak ones. The groups will end up with a 2:3 pattern.

Extension 1: Change the words to three syllables and four syllables (or any two numbers) and repeat the process.

Extension 2: Change to a phrase that defines a word. For example:

Brass instruments buzz (5 syllables)

Percussion means to strike (6 syllables)

With both extensions, throw in a little math by asking class to figure out how many syllables the word or phrase has, then how often the beats will come together (lowest common multiple.)

6. Groove with a Break

Intention – taking risks

Choose a four-beat rhythmic ostinato for everyone to play together. Keep going until it settles into a good groove then change to play a bar/rest a bar. During the rest, continue the pulse on laps. Then invite each person around the circle to fill in the break with their own rhythm. Emphasize there are no wrong answers!

**DRUM CIRCLES**

Basic lingo:

Rumble – everyone play like crazy

Pulse – steady beat played by everyone at the same time

Groove – everyone playing a rhythm of their own to a common pulse

Conducting gestures

Rumble – wiggle fingers

Louder – bring arms up

Softer – bring arms down

Stop – close fists

Groove – four fist pumps

Sculpt – create an improvisatory piece by offering specific rhythms, often drawn from players in the circle.

Invite kids to sculpt. Even kinders can do this!!!

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Resources:

**Dave Holland**

*Interactive Rhythm: Games, Songs & Interactions for the Music Educator, Music Therapist & Drum Circle Facilitator*

*Drumagination: A Rhythmic Play Book for Music Teachers, Music Therapists and Drum Circle Facilitators*

**Kalani**

*The Amazing Jamnasium: A Playful Companion to Together in Rhythm*

*Together in Rhythm: A Facilitator's Guide to Drum Circle Music*

**Mary Knysh**

*Innovative Drum Circles: Beyond Beat, Into Harmony*

*1-2, Let's All Play*

**Arthur Hull**

*Drum Circle Facilitation: Building Community Through Rhythm*